

Pride in service

What makes me proud of my military service? Well, there are several reasons. First, I love what I do — being an NCO. I believe anyone who is involved in anything meaningful has to love what he is doing, or he should not be involved in it. This is true for a job, career, relationship, sport, hobby or anything else.

I have experienced many bumps in the road of life. About four years ago, I hit one of those bumps; it was an emotional moment where I questioned why I was in the restaurant management industry. After some thought, I told my wife that I needed to do something where I had more purpose in my life. I suggested going into the Army Reserves. I was in the Army National Guard from 1992 to 2000. My wife told me to go active duty because she knew that was what I really wanted.

After speaking with my wife, I enlisted for active duty, June 14, 2006, and subsequently, reenlisted, Oct. 30, 2008, for six more years. Enlisting and re-enlisting are two of the best decisions of my life.

When I enlisted in 2006, I chose the Military Occupational Specialty 13D Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System Specialist. I had some knowledge of field artillery and what the job entailed from my previous military occupational specialty in the Army National Guard — a 13F Fire Support Specialist. I always felt that being involved in field artillery included a certain level of pride, considering its importance on the battlefield.

I am proud of my decision to be a 13D, but I never knew just how important being a part of a fire direction center was to an artillery unit.

I never imagined that two-and-a-half years after enlisting I would be a part of the NCO Corps, or even more so, a chief of a fire direction center. Of course, it involved a lot of hard work and dedication. This dedication did not only come from my personal drive, but from my supervising NCOs. Four of them stand out to me — SSG Joshua McCain, who was my section chief, SFC Rudolph Green; MSG Kevin Leopold; and 1SG Gary Lievense.

Mentors. These four NCOs always were very demanding. They constantly pushed and motivated me to do better. Every time I met one challenge, they raised the bar for me to excel to the next level. They always pushed me to be the best Soldier I could be, and they saw me make the transformation

from a lower enlisted Soldier to a sergeant in the NCO Corps.

SSG McCain always pushed me through training. He helped me transition through the positions of radio telephone operator, M1068A3 Driver and Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System Operator. When he was reassigned to the 428th Brigade, he saw me take over as the section chief.

SFC Green, as my platoon sergeant, always pushed me to lead from the front. He saw my potential as a leader and showed me how to grasp that potential through constructive criticism and guidance. MSG Leopold would push me to do better, through physical training, military occupational specialty proficiency and leadership.

1SG Gary Lievense became my battery's first sergeant shortly after I joined the NCO ranks. Though he was a very demanding first sergeant (as all should be), he always has leaned on me to meet suspenses. He knew I would have or would find the resources to get the tasks done.

Rewards. In my eight-month tenure as an NCO, I have earned the respect and confidence of my first sergeant and chain of command. Because of this, I was selected and appointed the battery's equal opportunity leader. This is a very demanding position and is one I always wanted to perform because of my personal beliefs about equal rights in the unit workplace.

Even though the hours are long and I must sacrifice time with my family, it is worth it. More importantly, my family supports me 100 percent despite these sacrifices.

My position as an NCO has provided me the opportunity to do what I enjoy the most — training, coaching and mentoring Soldiers; providing for their safety; and constantly living the field artillery mission. Becoming an NCO has added another dimension in my life.

Like my mentors, I push my Soldiers to be the best Soldiers they can be through training, mentorship and counseling. I am content in my position. In other words, I love what I do. These things give me the pride to serve as a Soldier and NCO. I am proud to be part of the field artillery and a member of the NCO Corps, the “backbone” of the Army. ■

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In this Year of the NCO, you might wonder what NCOs do for the U.S. Army. NCOs do it all. These leaders have their hands in every aspect of the Army from the simplest daily activities to the most complicated strategic planning. Let's get reacquainted with the “backbone of the Army.”

NCOs are responsible for the daily activities of the Army. These sergeants are the first-line supervisors for the majority of the work completed by Soldiers. These actions can be as simple as physical training or motor pool maintenance on vehicles or as complicated as leading a combat patrol in war.

Chances are high that every activity from processing pay documents to medical services at the hospital are executed and supervised by sergeants. They touch every aspect of our Soldiers' and our families' lives.

Need a military policeman for an emergency? Here comes a sergeant. Who is teaching at the Warrior Leader Course? A sergeant is instructing right now. Our sergeants find us before we are in the Army — as recruiters. Drill sergeants mold us from civilians into Soldiers. Career counselor

NCOs keep us in the Army. Sergeants teach us at Advance Individual Training and at Airborne, Ranger and other specialty schools. Sergeants develop future NCOs in the NCO Educational System. From the Warrior Leader Course to the Sergeants Major Course, NCOs develop the next generation. And who executes portions of Officer Candidate School? NCOs do.

What's an NCO? More bang for the buck

Enforcers. Sergeants enforce the rules, regulations and policies of the Army. NCOs don't make policy, they enforce it. Many have heard me say, “I don't make the rules; I get paid handsomely to enforce them.” The Army says what is proper and then empowers sergeants to enforce it. The key aspect to this notion is not the rule, but rather the discipline to enforce the standard. NCOs have the discipline to do the right thing and set the example.

So, “What is the big deal about wearing my patrol cap to the Post Exchange?” It is quite simple. A commissioned officer wrote the rule, making it a legal order — a simple and minor one some could argue. I support officers; therefore, I support their rules. Sergeants enforce both simple and complicated regulations.

Convenience and comfort have never been military priorities. If a Soldier or leader cannot enforce the simple rules, how will he tackle the complicated ones? It is a slippery slope of selective enforcement when individuals only correct the regulations they agree with.

Combat multipliers. What makes our Army different from others? The NCO. Armies from around the world send their officers to visit the U.S. to see how we run our Army. No one argues the commissioned officers are in charge. A recurring theme comes up, though, when foreign officers see our NCOs doing so much. The comments sound something like this, “How can you trust these sergeants to do so much?” Or, “Only our officers do that.”

And it is this decentralized implicit trust of our NCOs that creates a huge advantage over other armies. Decisions and actions take place where no officer is present. NCOs are combat multipliers.

Our Army learned years ago that NCOs can be trusted to execute tasks that historically might have been linked to officers. And historically, NCOs are officers. Sergeants are officers without a commission. There are several sources to refer to this topic, but I won't give a history lesson here. Read *Guardians of the Republic* by Ernest F. Fisher Jr. for a detailed narrative on the history of the NCO. For here and now, we need to know that the NCO is more “bang for the buck” for our Army than any other member.

The backbone. Sergeants train individuals, teams and crews. NCOs focus on all the single and small unit requirements that support the collective tasks of platoons and companies.

Sergeants ensure Soldiers are physically fit to arrive at the leading edge of battle. These same sergeants teach Soldiers how to shoot their weapons effectively. NCOs teach our Soldiers when not to shoot, which is sometimes more important. Sergeants take the theory of being a Soldier and apply it to people to make them Soldiers.

NCOs advise and mentor officers. Starting at the platoon level, our Army “marries” an officer with a seasoned NCO to accomplish missions. And it works. The combination of commissioned and noncommissioned officer is powerful and a

critical difference in our Army. Senior NCOs advise senior officers about all enlisted issues and concerns. Officers count on NCOs for recommendations on their most critical decisions. Want the truth? Ask an NCO.

NCOs preserve the traditions, customs and courtesies of the Army. From standing at attention or parade rest to drill and ceremonies, NCOs must preserve these “lost arts” of a war-time Army. Respecting the flag at retreat is an NCO function.

Politeness, respect and courtesy are historic indicators of discipline in our service. Who is preserving this tradition of the Army? The NCO must. When an NCO sees an infraction and makes no correction, a new standard is set.

So, if NCOs follow their creed, they will do two things. First, sergeants will accomplish their missions. Not only the ones they choose, but also the ones the Army gives them. NCOs enforce all of them.

And they must ensure the welfare of their Soldiers. Soldiers are a valuable commodity to be protected. To send untrained, undisciplined Soldiers to war is to kill them. NCOs save lives. They do all the dirty work and are quiet professionals who seek no reward other than the satisfaction of making a difference. They are the working class of the Army and the unsung heroes of our nation.

In this year of the NCO, have you thanked a sergeant today? ■

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SGT Jonathan Hinson leads fellow Soldiers in B Battery, 1st Battalion, 113th Field Artillery Regiment, 30th Brigade Combat Team, on a patrol south of Baghdad, Iraq, June 9. (Photo by SGT Mary Phillips, U.S. Army)